

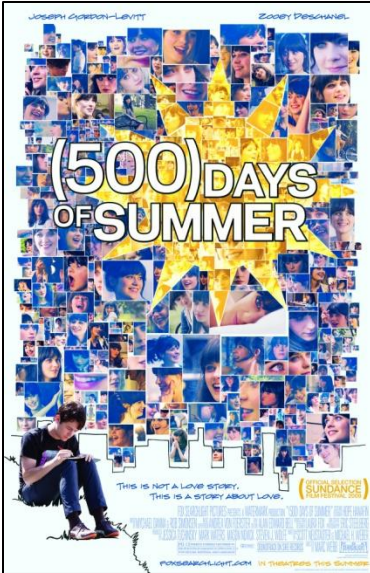
On DVD

# “500 Days of Summer”

Love and pain in store for star-crossed hipsters



By Capt. Tristan Hinderliter



There's no such thing as love. It's a fantasy.

So proclaims Summer Finn (Zooey Deschanel) in the 2009 romantic comedy “500 Days of Summer,” a poignant meditation on love, relationships and heartbreak.

Deschanel, who has recently become a bit of a feminist cultural touchstone and currently stars in the FOX series “New Girl” – is perfectly cast as the charming, zany and independent Summer. Her laissez-faire, no-strings-attached approach to relationships is very different than that of Tom Hansen (Joseph Gordon-Levitt), her co-worker at a greeting-card company in Los Angeles.

Tom, at the beginning of the movie at least, is a romantic. He believes in true love, fate, and that things happen for a reason. Despite their differing philosophies on love, the two have much in common, sharing similar taste in movies, music and books. Throughout the film, the two leads have tremendous on-screen chemistry.

We see events unfold from Tom's viewpoint, and the film draws its title from his account of the 500 days Summer was in his life.

Their courtship, relationship and its inevitable decline is portrayed through a very effective non-linear plot structure and other innovative filmmaking techniques by director Marc Webb, whose eye for detail is masterful. The theme of unrequited love is as old as storytelling itself, but it is shown here with refreshing compassion.

We know up front things do not work out between Tom and Summer; as the movie poster itself aptly describes, “This is not a love story. This is a story about love.”

After a relationship falls apart, it's natural look back and try to pinpoint where things went wrong. You ask yourself, what were the warning signs that I missed? What could I have done differently?

We see several scenes repeated not from a different character's viewpoint, but Tom himself reflecting on his memories in light of what he now knew was going to happen. The scenes are not repeated verbatim, but this time he's remembering small things that may have been the proverbial canaries in the coal mine. These are things as simple as a gesture, a glance, a tone of voice. Sometimes, they're the most important.

Tom is intelligent and caring, but sometimes sensitive to a fault. His desire to put a title on their relationship – which they never do – springs from his insecurity and fear that Summer will leave him. As he admits, he wants her to be his “girlfriend” so he will know she'll still like him in the morning. The sad reality is that no title is a sure promise of that.

Summer, however, has no interest in characterizing their relationship in traditional terms. She is fearful of commitment, and intransigent in her independence.

Despite their flaws, both the leads are very likable, and they are joined in this movie by an excellent supporting cast.

Tom's best friends McKenzie (Geoffrey Arend) and Paul (Matthew Gray Gubler) provide emotional support for Tom, and comic relief for the audience. Chloe Grace Moretz is brilliant as Rachel, Tom's little sister who consoles him after things go south with Summer.

Ultimately, the film transcends its romantic-comedy genre as it explores the mysteries of love and heartbreak. This 500-day Summer is one you won't want to miss.

*"500 Days of Summer" is rated PG-13.*